

# Article Alert

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## About the IRC

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Books, articles, and websites described in the Article Alert present a diversity of views in order to keep our IRC users abreast of current issues in the United States. These items represent the views and opinions of the authors and do not necessary reflect official U.S. Government policy.

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## Religious Diversity and Freedom



The 19th-century painting *Penn's Treaty With the Indians* depicts the founder of the Pennsylvania colony, Quaker William Penn, establishing friendly relations with Native American tribes in 1682. The painting is by artist Edward Hicks, who was born to an Episcopalian family but converted to the Quaker faith.

### Religious Diversity and Freedom

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution)

Religious freedom is one of the most prized liberties of the Ameri-

can people, a fact that strikes some people as incongruous if they think of the United States as a secular society. That very phrase, however, is misleading, in that it implies a society in which religion and religious ideals are absent, and secular values alone govern daily conduct. Religion is not absent from daily life in the United States; rather, the Constitution has created a system in which each individual and religious group can enjoy the full freedom to worship, free not only from the rein of government but from pressures by other sects as well.

Recent survey by Pew Research Centre finds that most Americans are religious, tolerant of other people's religious beliefs and strikingly non dogmatic, in a sense of not believing their own religion to be the only path to salvation.

If you want to know more about Religious Diversity and Freedom, please visit the websites below:

### Diversity At Worship

<http://amlife.america.gov/amlife/diversity/atworship.html>

### U.S. Religious Landscape-Pew

<http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>

### Main Religious Affiliations in the United States

<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/March/20080317160257zjsrena0.8236048.html>

### Presidential Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day 2008

<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/January/20080114154627xjsnom-mis0.8177149.html>

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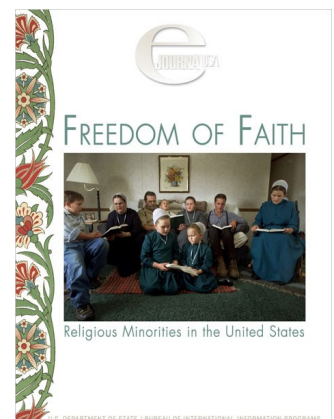
## New eJournal USA: Freedom of Faith

The principle of religious freedom is a cherished right in the United States, one that has historical roots older than the formation of the nation itself. In the 21st century, the United States pulses with a unique cultural chemistry brought on by a wave of immigration which has brought followers of more diverse faiths to many communities. This edition of eJournal

USA examines how the nation adjusts to these demographic changes to remain true to the principles of freedom of faith.

This journal is accessible for free at:

<http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/0808ej.pdf>



Religious Minorities in the United States

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE / BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS

## DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

1. Rogers, Peter **FACING THE FRESHWATER CRISIS** (Scientific American, August 2008)

Global freshwater resources are threatened by rising demands from many quarters. Growing populations need ever more water for drinking, hygiene, sanitation, food production and industry. Climate change, meanwhile, is expected to contribute to droughts. Policymakers need to figure out how to supply water without degrading the natural ecosystems that supplies, such as improved

methods to desalinate water. But governments at all levels need to start setting policies and making investments in infrastructure for water conservation now.

2. Vander Veen, Chad **NET GAINS** (Government Technology, vol. 21, no. 8, August 2008, pp. 16-20, 22)

According to the author, the World Wide Web is often dubbed "this generation's wild, Wild West," a raucous, freewheeling digital expanse; like the frontier, the Web is a showcase for an emerging society

with its own ideas, goals and morals. In the virtual world of the 21st century, the web has emerged as a "pivotal theater" in which candidates for office must battle -- it has blossomed from a campaign novelty to an essential tool to reach voters. The difference during the 2008 election cycle for president is the advent of Web 2.0 applications; chief among these new applications are social networking sites, such as MySpace, Facebook and Flickr. Barack Obama's website, for example, features various links

to social networking sites; some of them are broadly known, such as Digg and LinkedIn. Others target specific demographics, such as FaithBase, BlackPlanet and AsianAve; Obama uses each of these sites to deliver a message tailored to a niche audience. John McCain's site, meanwhile, makes heavy use of blogs and video. Both candidates' web site contain a feature that enables online donations, an innovation started by Howard Dean in his unsuccessful 2004 presidential race.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

3. Hunt, Suzanne **BIOFUELS, NEITHER SAVIOUR NOR SCAM: THE CASE FOR A SELECTIVE STRATEGY** (World Policy Journal, vol. 25, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 9-17)

Hunt, an independent consultant to the U.S. Energy Department, weighs carefully the advantages and disadvantages of biofuels, both oversimplified in a debate about their potential role in addressing energy needs and climate change. She tends to agree with the view that biofuels produced from food crops have little influence on grain prices.

She treads more carefully on the issue of net energy benefits. According to several studies, the production and use of virtually all biofuels produced today will lead to a net increase in greenhouse gas emissions. Hunt cautions, however, that such assessments are very complex. The production and use of biofuels is associated with trade-offs and risks but also with opportunities. Dealing rationally with this energy source requires developing effective safeguards against the risks and capitalizing on the opportunities, she says.

4. Sass, Steven **OVERTIME** (Boston College Magazine, vol. 68, no. 3, Summer 2008, pp. 40-46, 48)

The author writes that job holders in the soon-to-retire Baby Boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1962, will have to work longer than their parents did. In the 1960s and 1970s, the creation of Medicare and the expansion of Social Security and employer-defined pension plans created the Golden Age of retirement. These programs let the World War II generation exit the labor

force at a historically young age with enough income to maintain its standard of living. With cutbacks in Social Security and the general disappearance of traditional pensions, that option is gone. To enjoy a reasonably comfortable old age, the Baby Boom generation has little choice but to stay in the labor force longer. The picture is further complicated by a new instability in employment for older workers, and much more frequent job changes.

## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

5. Jones, Sidney **BRIEFING FOR THE NEW PRESIDENT: THE TERRORIST THREAT IN INDONESIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA** (Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 618, no. 1, July 2008, pp. 69-78)

Jones, advisor to the International Crisis Group's Asia program, asserts that counterterrorism capacity in Southeast Asia is improving, reducing the likelihood of a major attack on Western targets in the near term. However, jihadi ideology

has taken root in Indonesia, and while the region's largest terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah, appears to be more interested in rebuilding than mounting operations, its members still constitute an important recruitment pool for other

groups. Most Indonesian jihadis appear to be more focused on local than foreign targets, but that focus can aid recruitment and facilitate alliances with other organizations. The author argues that while the Iraq insurgency has not attracted

## Continued...

Southeast Asian participation, the resurgence of the Taliban on the Afghan-Pakistan border could. Moreover, the United States, under the next president, could help develop better information sharing between South and Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia may not be the "second front" that many feared after the first Bali bombs, but the terrorism threat in the region has not gone away.

6. Sigal, Leon V. A WAR WITHOUT END (World Policy Journal,

vol. 24, no. 3, Fall 2007, pp. 1-7)

Sigal, with the Social Science Research Council in New York, examines the war in Iraq, and specifically at exit strategies for the U.S. He finds little in America's historical experience with war termination that prepares it for ending the war in Iraq. For the U.S., the costs of exiting Iraq without ending the war will be great, but America will have to bear those costs eventually. He believes that at this point,

the U.S. should not prolong a fight it cannot finish; the Iraqis themselves will have to end this war and reconcile with each other.

7. Taylor, Humphrey THE NOT-SO-BLACK ART OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY (World Policy Journal, vol. 24, no. 4, Winter 2007/08, pp. 51-59)

Humphrey Taylor, defines public diplomacy as how leaders and countries explain themselves and their policies to the world. Most people around the world

do not see themselves as others see them. Children are taught that their country is better than others and the media and politicians reinforce these beliefs. Public diplomacy should work closely with traditional diplomacy and rely upon culture and values to promote goodwill and respect between countries. The media in other nations is a potential tool of influence and America must work toward getting more positive coverage of the U.S. and its policies in the foreign media.

## U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

8. Laster, Lori Ann WELCOME BACK TO GROVER'S CORNERS (American Theatre, 25, no. 5, May/June 2008, pp. 24-27, 74-75)

Thornton Wilder's enduring classic, 'Our Town,' continues on as more than just a tribute to small-town America but a commentary on the human condition. According to Tappan Wilder, the playwright's nephew and literary executor, it is widely believed that 'Our Town' is performed at least once each night somewhere in this country and it has become part of the curriculum in American Studies departments in foreign universities. It has been performed in several overseas productions sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, sometimes with well-known actors in the cast. At the time the play was written and first performed in Princeton, New Jersey, in January 1938, the threat of World War II was looming, while the U.S. was still recovering from the Great Depression. The play represents a return to a more tranquil time. The author notes

that with global political tensions in the world today, the play continues to provide a sense of comfort and stability, and a return to small-town American values.

9. Murray, Charles ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE GOING TO COLLEGE? (The Magazine: Monday, September 8, 2008)

To ask whether too many people are going to college requires us to think about the importance and nature of a liberal education. "Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood," John Stuart Mill told students at the University of St. Andrews in 1867. "Their object is not to make skillful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings." If this is true (and I agree that it is), why say that too many people are going to college? Surely a mass democracy should encourage as many people as possible to become "capable

and cultivated human beings" in Mill's sense. We should not restrict the availability of a liberal education to a rarefied intellectual elite. More people should be going to college, not fewer.

10. Rossetto, Louis IN A LETTER TO HIS KIDS, WIRED'S FOUNDING EDITOR RECALLS THE DAWN OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION (Wired Magazine, vol. 16, no. 6, June 2008, pp. 172-175)

Rossetto, cofounder of Wired Magazine, reflects on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of his magazine on the predictions for the Internet he made in 1993, and how things have actually turned out. Rossetto notes that he started Wired to chronicle the people, companies, and ideas driving the digital revolution -- but had only the vaguest notion of where it was headed. Major misses included "the end of history", characterized by Francis Fukuyama's famous prediction that history ended with the demise

of the Soviet Union; Wired failed to see that extremist groups would use the Internet to propagate virulent ideology. Another misstep was believing that the Internet would lead to the end of politics; Rossetto notes, instead of using the Internet to rebuild civil society, special-interest groups used it to get into the "mud" of politics, resulting in "one of the most toxic and least productive eras of public discourse in our history." Among the trends Rossetto believes they accurately predicted were what he calls the "Long Boom," the unprecedented increase in material well-being for much of humanity; the spread of liberal democracy, globalization, and a technological revolution; and what has been termed the "One Machine", a new planetary consciousness developing among humans using ever-more-powerful PCs and networks.

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RECALLS THE DAWN OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

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